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Viewing cable 09CARACAS724, OPPOSITION ANNOUNCES NEWEST UNITY EFFORT

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09CARACAS724	2009-06-10 21:48	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Caracas

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.semana.com/nacion/wikileaks-venezuela-tumbos-oposicion-chavez-segun-eeuu/158452-3.aspx>

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PP RUEHAO RUEHCD RUEHGA RUEHGD RUEHHA RUEHHO RUEHMC RUEHMT RUEHNG
RUEHNL RUEHQU RUEHRD RUEHRC RUEHRS RUEHTM RUEHVC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000724

SIPDIS

HQSOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
DEPARTMENTPASS TO AID/OTI (RPORTER)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/02/2029
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: OPPOSITION ANNOUNCES NEWEST UNITY EFFORT

CARACAS00000724 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR FRANCISCO FERNANDEZ,
FOR REASON 1.4(D)

¶11. (C) Summary: Opposition political parties held a June 8 press conference to announce that they are creating a "unity table" with a structure of 11 committees aimed at drafting a single democratic alternative to Chavismo. The presence of virtually all political party leaders across the ideological spectrum was offset, however, by the absence of many younger generation political figures. Political observers indicate that opposition parties are beset from within by ongoing power struggles particularly between older leaders and the younger generation -- many of whom hold office and can claim an electoral base of support. With at least a year until major elections are expected, the opposition has the time to organize itself, but probably not the will to sacrifice personal ambition for the sake of unity. End Summary.

OPPOSITION CALLS FOR UNITY

¶12. (SBU) Opposition political party leaders held a June 8 press conference at the Christian Democrat (COPEI) headquarters in Caracas to announce the creation of an opposition "unity table." COPEI Secretary General Luis Ignacio Planas served as the group's spokesman and called for the creation of 11 committees to discuss issues ranging from elections to international affairs. He said this work would eventually lead to a unified "democratic alternative" platform. Planas also announced that the group stood in solidarity with Globovision, the opposition-oriented cable news network that Chavez recently threatened to close.

¶13. (SBU) In answer to press queries, Planas did not elaborate on any specifics, notably refusing to comment on elections either for the National Assembly or within the parties. In a typical display of poor coordination, the small opposition Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) party's national coordinator, Jose Antonio Espana, preempted the press conference by announcing a day prior that MAS supported a unity opposition ticket for elections and had its own party agenda that prioritized fighting poverty. Early on June 8, Accion Democratica (AD) Secretary General Henry Ramos Allup told a radio interviewer that he did not favor the creation of a single opposition electoral ticket.

¶14. (C) The press conference was well-attended by leaders from the traditional opposition, including formerly pro-government Podemos party and Mayor of Greater Caracas Antonio Ledezma. Among the 50 or so leaders on camera, however, there were just two female faces visible and very little enthusiasm. Also conspicuously absent were the younger generation of heir-apparents within the parties, including Miranda State Governor Henrique Capriles Radonski and the mayors of the Sucre and Baruta boroughs of Caracas, Carlos Ocariz and Gerardo Blyde. Former Chacao municipality Mayor Leopoldo Lopez created some disruption when he arrived near the end of Planas' speech with his successor, Emilio Grateron, in tow and began greeting the other party representatives seated near him. Planas also struggled to stay on a positive, clear message focused on unity, answering baited questions from reporters representing state-owned media outlets who asked how this effort differed from the Coordinadora Democratica that actively opposed Chavez in the run-up to the unsuccessful 2004 recall referendum.

COLLAPSING FROM WITHIN?

¶15. (C) Un Nuevo Tiempo (UNT) activist Yenny De Freitas told Poloffs June 8 that the party continues to suffer from a major schism between its self-exiled leader, Manuel Rosales, and Leopoldo Lopez. She said that Lopez, who is currently in charge of UNT's outreach, is scheming to create his own opposition "movement" outside of the current party system --

likely taking advantage of the networks he has developed in his current role and his personal popularity within Caracas. She noted that Lopez no longer attends UNT meetings and said that Lopez and Grateron's noticeably late entrance to the press conference was intentional. De Freitas contended that both Grateron and Gerardo Blyde, who was UNT's most recent secretary general, would follow Lopez if he left the party. She also suggested that the other parties are privately happy about UNT's distress and are angling to take advantage of it to increase their own relative stature within the opposition.

¶ 6. (C) Political observers have also told Poloffs that within COPEI, Planas has poor relations with Governor of Tachira State Cesar Perez Vivas and COPEI Deputy Secretary General Alejandro Vivas. Perez Vivas is rumored to be angling to use his electoral base to wrest control of the party away from Caracas-based Planas. Within Accion Democratica (AD), party president Victor Bolivar confided to Polcouns a few months ago that he was struggling to convince AD Secretary General Henry Ramos Allup that the party needed a "renovation" and the retirement of its older leadership -- which is widely perceived as discredited. Bolivar would like to allow new, younger faces to emerge among its leadership ranks. According to Bolivar, Allup was reluctant to sacrifice his own prominence within the party.

¶ 7. (C) Governor of Carabobo State Henrique Salas Feo, who is president of the small opposition Proyecto Venezuela party, told the Charge d'Affaires June 9 (septel) that the unity effort is a waste of time. He said opposition leaders are too busy jockeying to be the next President of Venezuela, rather than focusing on the needs of the people. Salas Feo opined that with so much time before the next major elections, the issues at hand should be resolving Venezuelans' social ills rather than choosing the next leadership of the opposition movement.

COMMENT

¶ 8. (C) While the opposition's much-heralded "unity" announcement was a worthy first step aimed at creating a democratic alternative to Chavez, it was underwhelming in its execution. Planas offered only vague promises of unity committees that would, in theory, come to a consensus on more detailed strategies. The stated goal may also be somewhat unrealistic given the widely divergent ideological views among the parties, which range from socialist to right-wing Christian democrat. Planas also failed to pronounce what the opposition stood for, preferring to make cheap-shot remarks against Chavez.

¶ 9. (C) The lethargic and at times indifferent attitude of the opposition leaders in attendance (some of whom paid more attention to their Blackberries than to Planas' speech) stands in marked contrast to Chavez's enthusiastic, color-coordinated PSUV rallies and underscores the opposition's inability to present even a temporarily united image. The absence of the more popular younger generation of opposition leaders almost certainly will feed speculation that all is not well within the parties, and that disgruntled figures like Leopoldo Lopez may be preparing to launch their own self-serving "movement" at the expense of whatever cohesion the current opposition parties are able to achieve.

CAULFIELD